

This editorial originally appeared in the Chicago tribune on February 12, 2010.

Blindsided by a candidate whose troubled past threatened to take down the Democratic ticket, Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan has reached a conclusion that Rep. Bill Mitchell, R-Forsyth, embraced long ago: Illinois doesn't need a lieutenant governor.

Mitchell filed a proposed constitutional amendment last year to abolish the job. His argument was bluntly pragmatic: Taxpayers waste \$2.5 million a year on the do-nothing office. Naturally, his bill went nowhere.

The along came Scott Lee Cohen, a Chicago pawnbroker who spent \$2 million of his own money to win the Democratic nomination and promptly self-destructed. Cohen was once charged with holding a knife to the throat of his prostitute girlfriend. His ex-wife says she was afraid to be alone with him back when he was abusing steroids, though, no he's an OK guy who happens to be \$54,000 behind in his child support. Party leaders didn't sniff this out before the primary because since when does this race matter? Oops.

It took Democratic leaders less than a week to convince Cohen he should leave the ticket, but the damage was done. There's a lot of finger-pointing over who should have seen this coming, and a potentially ugly fight brewing over who will replace him on the ballot. Not to mention that

his tearful withdrawal announcement interrupted a great Super Bowl. All of a sudden Bill Mitchell is right: who needs this?

So Madigan has filed his own amendment to eliminate the lite gov office. The measure needs a three-fifths majority of both houses by May 2 to appear on the November ballot. If it passes, the job would go away in 2015, and good riddance.

So let's do it.

But why stop there? We like to think of Madigan's proposal as the first step in a massive government disarmament campaign. Sen. Kwame Raoul, D-Chicago, is sponsoring a bill that would ax the state comptroller's office, shifting those responsibilities to the treasurer. That's a plan already championed by Republican Judy Baar Topinka, who's running for the office she'd like to see eliminated. Topinka says merging the offices would save taxpayers \$20 million a year.

While we're at it, let's cut the Chicago City Council in half. With 50 aldermen, the council is almost as big as the councils of Los Angeles, Houston, Detroit, and Philadelphia *combined*.

And we're just getting warmed up here. Illinois has almost 7,000 units of local government, including 871 school districts and 1,400 townships. Many of them are redundant or obsolete or both, existing only to soak up tax dollars and provide paychecks for somebody's friends or relatives.

We're not the only ones who want to fire up the chain saw. U.S. Rep Mike Quigley, D-Chicago, got worked up in a phone conversation Thursday.

"If Speaker Madigan is going to eliminate useless government, I hope he doesn't stop at lieutenant governor," said Quigley, a former Cook County commissioner. "Kill the townships, the regional school superintendents, the county recorder, the state comptroller, half of the school districts in Illinois. If you need more, call me back. I mean it."

It's an uphill fight, for all the wrong reasons. Just look at the people who are opposed to killing that ever-essential lite gov job. Jason Plummer, the Republican nominee, says it would be "just another job lost under Mike Madigan and the Democratic leadership.: Hello, Mr. Plummer! Illinois needs real jobs, not fake ones. Get with the program.

Gov. Pat Quinn can't bring himself to support eliminating the useless office he used to hold. "Gov. Quinn knows the office can serve as a strong voice for everyday people, including veterans service members and their families," his press office said, conveniently overlooking the obvious. Illinois hasn't had a lieutenant governor for more than a year. Raise your hand if you noticed.